

Testimony of John Fox of Simsbury and of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1926 in support of

HB 7244 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR VETERANS HAVING
DISABILITY RATINGS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2019
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

10:00 AM Room 1E

Chairman Maroney, Chairwoman Borer, distinguished members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee, for the record my name is John Fox of Simsbury and Commander of Post 1926 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and I am offering this testimony in support of HB 7244.

Thank you for holding this public hearing and the opportunity to submit testimony here today. I am a disabled veteran of the Vietnam War. My disabilities are very minor and luckily it did not impact my career as a scientist, an engineer and later in management. That is only because my skills were my brain and not physical although later in my career my hearing loss became a handicap in my work and was one of the reasons I retired early. However, other disabled veterans I have met through the VFW have not been so lucky. Their disabilities have limited their careers. Some have had brain injuries, others suffer from diseases due to agent orange or other toxic poisons, loss of sight or loss of limb. This was done in service to their country in harm's way. They struggle to make a decent living often in support of a family. They receive very little from the Department of Veteran Affairs for disability pay, between \$0 to \$30,000 /year. One veteran in my community had 3 Traumatic Brain Injuries and has a wife and 3 kids. He is on 80% disability receiving \$25,000 / year and cannot work because he cannot stand due to equilibrium issues, cannot handle bright lights, and his memory is poor.

As you are probably aware the property taxes in Simsbury are quite high. A modest home under 2000 square feet runs about \$8000. To a disabled veteran with limited income potential and receiving disability pay this represents a significant portion of their disability compensation. Please remember as you decide on this legislation that these were servicemen that served their country overseas and in harm's way and most volunteered to do it

While I support HB7244 and the legislative realization that Connecticut could do more for its veterans, there are some issues with the legislation as written and I suggest the following changes:

1. The amounts proposed for appraised property value exemptions based on the level of disability are not adequate. The average property tax in Connecticut is approximately \$8000

2. The use of dollar amounts should be changed to percentage of relief from property tax corresponding to disability rating
3. The exemption requirement on municipalities should be “shall” before all exemptions instead of “may”.
4. What is glaringly wrong is that it must be assumed that any person receiving greater than 90% disability pay that pay is likely their sole income, other than what the spouse makes, and that person should be exempt from property tax.
5. The 3-year limitation on retroactive refund of property taxes (page 3 of 4) should be extended given that the Department of Veteran’s Affairs appeal process averages 2.5 years and in many cases the veterans have to file multiple appeals. This is especially true for veterans seeking 100% disability.

In conclusion I urge you to consider this legislation to make Connecticut a place that veterans can more easily call home. For many of our disabled veterans, home ownership in Connecticut is out of reach largely due to the high property taxes. I also urge you to consider the points I raise in my testimony to improve the proposed legislation for the sake of our veterans that gave so much in their service to this state and to our country. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectively

John R Fox

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